

Settling Children In

Now you have chosen right childminder for your child, it is important to help prepare your child for when they start being cared for by their new childminder. You want everything to go as smoothly as possible and that involves preparing your child with several visits to the childminder before you return to work/ study so that they begin to build an emotional **attachment** with their new childminder.

Most childminders work alone, but others work with other people. When this is the case there may be a 'key person' system in place whereby one adult will be the key person that is responsible for working closely with your child and monitoring their learning and development. It is this key person who is expected to build the main emotional **attachment** with the child.

Some children, especially at particular stages of their emotional development, find separation from their parents and other familiar adults in their lives difficult to cope with.

Although being cared for by several adults does not usually unsettle new babies too much, by the age of 6 months they become much more suspicious of people they don't know. Most children up to the age of 3 years find it difficult to be separated from their known adults.

So what is Attachment?

Attachment Theory describes the need to develop strong emotional relationships (attachments) between the child and the adults who care for them.

Attachment Theory was originally developed by a British Doctor, John Bowlby (1907-1990). He began researching and writing on the theory in the 1940s and was an active researcher into the subject right up until his death in 1990.

Research on brain development has confirmed that babies who have secure attachments with sensitive and responsive caregivers are happier, less stressed and more engaged; they recover more quickly from fearful or upsetting experiences and fare better in social situations.

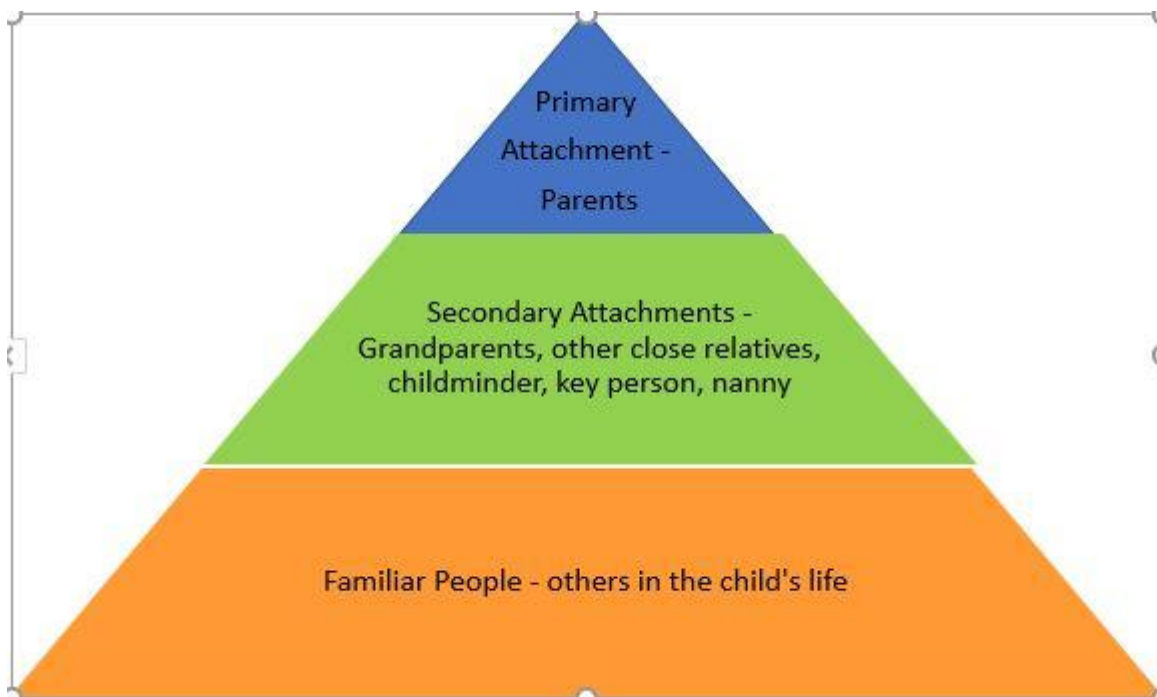
Children's early relationships affect their development and their capacity to form later relationships, so it is important that your child(ren) can build close relationships with the childminder and any other adults in the childminding setting.

I'm worried my child love his/her childminder more than me

It is important that your child builds a close relationship with his/her childminder but there are different types of attachment relationships as the diagram below shows.

- Primary Attachments are those that are the most important and long lasting. These are normally built with the child's parents.
- Secondary Attachments are those built with others who are close to the child and who the child has relationships with such as Grandparents and other close relatives. Childminders will aim for your child to have a secure **Secondary Attachment** with them.
- Familiar people - everyone else in your child's life.

Anyone who doesn't fit into this pyramid is a stranger to the child, so the purpose of settling in sessions is to ensure that your child is left with someone familiar and not with a stranger. Ideally your child needs to feel comfortable going to the childminder for fun and comfort for when the childminding arrangement starts.



Organising Settling in Visits

Because all children are different, there is no one method that will work for everyone. Babies and younger children will generally take longer to settle than school aged children, who can understand explanations of what is happening and know that parents will come back at a certain time e.g. after work or after they have played and had their lunch.

Settling in should be decided jointly between you and the childminder. You know your child best and will have an instinct as to how long it will take them to settle. If you think your child needs more or less sessions than the childminder is offering, don't be afraid to suggest something different.

The most effective is to carry out several settling in sessions over several weeks before the childminding arrangement starts. Try to arrange them when the other children who your child will be mixing with once your return to work/study are there. You may like to arrange some so your child meets other members of the childminders family too if they will be home when your child attends.

More and more childminders are also carrying out home visits as they see what the child is like in their own environment, where they feel totally safe and relaxed and this also helps the children 'link' the childminder to their family, which helps the child 'accept' the childminder as part of their circle of important people.

You may wish to do the first sessions where you stay with your child for the whole time. Then start leaving him/her for short periods; some childminders will offer you a seat in another room, or you may choose to sit in your car or walk around the block. This way, you are close by if needed. Gradually extend the length of time you leave your child for.

For babies or younger children, arrange the first when your child has been fed and had a sleep so they are at their best and then move onto other times of the day so that you gradually introduce routines such as feeding, napping and nappy changing, so that by the time you return to work/study, you know your child has experienced the childminder catering for all his/her needs. S/he will also start to be familiar with the routines at the childminders home and know the other children cared for at the same time.

Comfort/Security/Transitional Objects

Comfort or security blankets/objects are also called transitional objects because the child carries them everywhere they go and when they move or **transition** from one carer or place to another it is important they have the feeling of security with them to help them feel safe.

Children will often choose their own transitional object around the age of 8 to 12 months and may keep it for several years. Some children will choose one of their original toys/objects and that will be their transitional object for a period of time until they replace it with something different. All are equally important to the child.

Young children are learning that they are a person in their own right and separate from their mother. Having a transitional object can help children to self-soothe and can be a valuable emotional support for children entering a childcare arrangement.

When a child brings a transitional object from home to a childminding setting it helps because it is familiar in unfamiliar surroundings. Transitional objects smell of the child, parents and home and helps the child to feel emotionally attached to parents (and home) even when the child is not with parents.

Transitional objects are not normally expected to be shared with other children in the childminders setting but kept for the child when they need it. Over time, your child may not need it close to them all the time, but it is important they know where it is for when they need it – particularly if they don't have the language to ask for it. Some childminders may have special places for each child to store their items from home or you may arrange to have it stored in the child's bag when not in use so it is easily accessible and your child knows it is accessible.

What if my child doesn't have a comfort object?

Not all children have a particular comfort object and some parents try to discourage their children from having a particular object they become attached to.

When they first start with their childminder, it is helpful if they take something familiar from home each day. If your child is old enough to choose something, it may be different every day, but that doesn't matter. It is the link with home that is important.

Saying 'Goodbye'

It can be very tempting to delay saying goodbye to your little one if they seem upset at you leaving them, or even to sneak away so they don't notice the moment you leave.

If you delay saying goodbye, it could encourage your child to just cling to you as they don't want you to leave. While they are clinging to you they may just get more and more upset before you eventually do leave. It is much better to explain to the child that you will stay for a minute and then go. You may find that your child likes a particular routine for your goodbyes. You may give 3 kisses or ask them to wave through a certain window for example. And remind your child that you are coming back by saying something like 'see you later' or 'Mummy will come back after you have had your lunch'.

It is never a good idea to sneak out and not say goodbye. This can lead to your child feeling abandoned. If your child is engrossed in a toy and then you just disappear, this is much worse for the child than if you say you are going but remind them you will be back later.

Some children will cry when you leave but stop as soon as you have left and start enjoying their day with their childminder and their new friends.

Most childminders are happy to text you when your child has settled and sometimes children will stop crying in time for you to hear this as you leave the house.

What if we don't have time for many settling in sessions?

Sometimes a childcare arrangement starts at short notice, so you may not have time for lots of settling in sessions. When this is the case try to fit in one short visit so that you and your child can meet the childminder and see the environment. If this isn't possible, you could ask if you can arrive early on the first day so you can stay with your child for a while before you have to leave – and perhaps arrange to come back a little earlier than usual so the day isn't too long on their first day.

Summary

You know your child best and know whether they will settle quickly or will need a longer period of time to get familiar enough with their new childminder to be comfortable in those early days. Discuss the settling in procedures you and your child need with your childminder and tailor them for you and your child. Allow your child to take something from home that is familiar with them - either a comfort object or just a familiar one. Remember that the purpose is to help your child become familiar with the childminder before you return to work/study and that they will understand the routine that you will go but you will always come back. Allow a few minutes at the beginning of the day to get your child settled before you leave and tell the childminder any information they need such as times of fees etc. and a few minutes at the end of the day to talk to the childminder about how your child has been during the day and what activities/outings they have enjoyed. Many childminders will offer you a written daily diary where they will record all the important information such as sleep times, nappy changes, how well your child has eaten, any outings they have been on and what your child has particularly enjoyed etc. The idea of a daily diary is that it is a two-way diary, so you can also add details for your childminder.